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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ways liberal arts colleges and universities can conceptualize and design next generation service and learning programs that give more considered attention to the service dimension. A Service and Learning typology suggests four variations found on many campuses in which service and learning have some relationship: (1) service-LEARNING, where the primary emphasis is on learning goals; (2) SERVICE-learning with the primary outcomes service oriented, and learning goals second; (3) service learning, with the service and learning goals separate; and (4) SERVICE-LEARNING, where the goals are of equal weight and enhance each other. In designing programs for linking service and learning, it is necessary to define the participants, their purposes, the entity that defines the service and learning, the relationship of all parties involved, and the primary learners and servers. These things are determined by looking at the experience of program planners, reflections on changing views of service and learning, openness to new perspectives, and open dialogue. (SLD)

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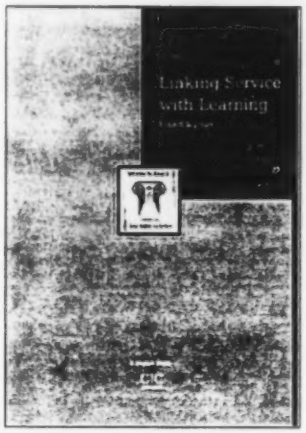

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Linking Service with Learning In Liberal Arts Education

by Robert L. Sigmon

In the fall of 1993, seeking to highlight service learning activities already underway in liberal arts colleges, CIC began the project Serving to Learn, Learning to Serve

Liberal arts colleges and universities have an opportunity in the linking of service with learning to create a congruent service ethic throughout the campus culture and within the curriculum.

The Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) chose the theme "Serving to Learn, Learning to Serve" for a new project designed, as the project announcement stated, "to make an important contribution to society by developing and sharing a next generation of service and learning programs."

This paper explores ways liberal arts colleges and universities can conceptualize and design next generation service and learning programs that give more considered attention to the service dimension. The paper grows out of my over 30 years designing, managing, and learning from students, faculty and citizens in communities involved in service and learning programs.

Background and a Typology

Service-learning, a phrase coined by a Southern Regional Education Board program in the late 1960s, was originally defined as "the integration of the accomplishment of a needed task with educational growth." The evolution of this service–based learning approach has been reported in a two-volume work, *Combining Service and Learning*, published by the National Society for Experiential Education. Leaders in the field gathered at Wingspread in 1989 to share their understanding of service learning; the Wingspread document "Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning" grew out of extensive consultation with more than 70 organizations. In the past decade, other groups (e.g., Campus Compact, COOL, the Partnership for Service-Learning, the Corporation for National and Community Service) have added perspectives and resources to the ongoing development of a service-learning perspective.

Many definitions and approaches have been used within the general framework of linking service with learning. Throughout this century, college and university efforts have seen two basic forms of student engagement with the world beyond the campus. One is that many students work in private and public sector jobs to support themselves financially. In recent decades this has also included on-campus work-study programs. The other is voluntary action or direct service activities in which students have given "service" to "those in need." Neither of these approaches, for the most part, has sought consciously to link these work and voluntary activities with either learning or an ethic of service.

The Service and Learning Typology (below) suggests four variations found on many campuses today in which service and learning have some relationship. The types are defined by their initial aims rather than whatever outcomes eventually emerge. This typology is not intended to be hierarchical, for each area has a distinctive agenda. However, SERVICE–LEARNING (#4) is my preferred choice for designing a next generation of programs which link service and learning.

A Service and Learning Typology

1. service-LEARNING *(LEARNING goals primary, service outcomes secondary)*

Courses rooted in academic disciplines are emerging as a primary base to which a discrete service

component is added. Examples include:

Writing and Critical Thinking courses which engage students in writing projects for public agencies.

Political Science courses that include exposure/engagement with a public agency or leader as part of the course design.

Courses in which Learning to teach reading courses are augmented by students doing active tutoring.

Traditional clinical training programs. The learning agenda is central, while the service setting is secondary.

2.SERVICE–learning *(SERVICE outcomes primary, learning goals secondary)*

These programs begin with a service need being clearly stated by the acquirers of the service. A learning agenda is derived from what knowledge is needed to carry out the service assignment with integrity. Advocacy or research projects identified by communities fit in this grouping. Content and methodology are determined by the situation. The service agenda is central, the learning is secondary.

3.service learning *(service and learning goals completely separate)*

Notice that there is no hyphen. Some institutions sponsor programs designed with both service and learning intentions, but with the two components viewed as distinct and separate from the other. No expectation is stated that the service experience will enhance the learning nor that the learning will enhance the service.

4. SERVICE–LEARNING *(SERVICE and LEARNING goals of equal weight and each enhances the other for all participants)*

In these programs the service and the learning are balanced and the hyphen is essential. The defined needs/requests of individuals, communities, or agencies are linked to defined learning expectations for students. In a SERVICE–LEARNING approach, all parties to the arrangement are seen as learners and teachers as well as servers and served. In these programs, we are challenged to respect local situations for what they can teach. Likewise, students are challenged to be their best, to listen, to explore, to learn, to share from their emerging capacities, and gain increased capacity for self-directed learning.

Four Questions

In designing programs for linking serving and learning, four relevant questions are:

Who is involved?

What do they seek?

Who defines the service and learning?

What is the relationship of those involved?

Who are the primary learners and servers? Who are the primary persons being served?

What roles, expectations and relationships are assigned to which parties in the arrangement? (See the map below for the range of possibilities.)

What is sought/desired/needed/proposed? Clarifying *what* service and learning is being sought by *whom* is essential first-order business.

Who defines the service and learning locates the initiative right at the heart of power and control domains. Where does the dialogue begin? With the academic agenda? With the expressed situation of the human service agency? With a specific community situation? With the desire of a student to find out something or try to remedy something? With the need for good public relations in the community by either the college or the community groups?

The kind of relationships is the key element in this examination. In any service-based program, it is essential to align the key relationships on principles of mutual respect, realizing that each person has the potential to be learner and teacher, server and served.

In linking learning with service activity, the central axis is between citizen and student. On the left axis are traditional learning supports and on the right, traditional service or work supports. This map has multiple uses for clarifying primary and secondary relationships, roles, and expectations or who seeks what as defined by whom.

INSERT GRAPHIC:

Map For Locating Who Seeks What, as Defined by Whom,

A Story

Our stories matter a great deal when we intend to link service with learning. What follows are metaphors that suggest in story form where we find ourselves today.

Imagine yourself on a bike ride. You are in a huge forest with a hundred paths. Your mountain bike is one with you as you enjoy the filtered sunlight, the sights and sounds of the natural world surrounding you, a surprising flash of flower color. The breezes are soft. Your endorphins have kicked in. You are free and your mind and spirit are sailing.

Some clouds come up. The trail gets bumpy. You think of turning back for home, but you feel so good you go on. A map with the paths you are following is on the handlebar. With no warning, a gust of wind blows up dust on the trail, and when you look down, the map has blown away.

There you are, alone, in the middle of a huge forest. No map. The clouds darken. You are not sure where you are nor the direction back home. No sun to align with. No compass in your bike bag. You haven't seen another person for over 45 minutes. You stop.

What are you feeling? What options are before you? Will you stay put? Strike out in a direction?

Many of us sense that our institutions have been following existing maps for a long time, that some dust storms have been kicking up all around us, and its time to consider where we are and what direction we want to be going.

As you sit in the woods you recall being lost before and what you did then. You begin to draw on your *prior experience*. Simultaneously you recall dreams of what you really want to be about and do in the world and what you need to learn to be able to do this. Your sense of *future direction* joins your prior experience as two resources for dealing with the current reality of being lost in the woods.

Will you trust your innate instincts?

Will you expect a charismatic prince or princess to come along and take you back home or to some new location?

Is it likely, since the place is so lovely, that some hiker or rider will come by and strike up a dialogue with you about your location and possible avenues to your next destination?

Could you camp out for days in the forest with the natural elements and animals? By being in a natural place—within the give and take of the wilderness, the beauty, the decay, the violence, the rhythms of light and dark—new possibilities for maps and ways of learning, teaching, serving, and being served can be imagined.

Can you make the time to listen, to look around, to sense what is happening in the world of ideas, of global connections, of misfortunes and injustices, of places where people live and work, of our own experience, and within ourselves? And connect these learnings with your own dreams and either revise your older maps or create some new maps? I believe that service linked with learning in a range of options within college curricula and among groups of people outside the academy offers higher education an opportunity to evolve some new maps and pathways for doing and being, serving and learning.

Four Suggestions

Here are four ways I find useful in listening, seeing, being open to and supporting the movement toward linking service with learning, with a focus on how we serve and are served by our actions in the world.

Probing our own experience of serving and being served

A common language and respect for one another can be enhanced by asking three questions of those involved in serving-to-learn and learning-to-serve enterprises (board members, alums, administrators, faculty, citizens, students, parents of students, employers of graduates, et. al.):

1) In what ways and by whom have you been served well over your lifetime?

2) In what ways have you served others well over the past five years?

3) In what ways do you serve yourself well now?

After the first question, I ask individuals to sit silently for up to eight minutes. Paper and pencil can be available for sketching a memory of being served well. Then, in pairs, participants listen to another's story of how they have been served well and tell their own story.

Question two follows. New pairs can form to share stories about how they have served well.

Question three emerges out of the prior questions, yet giving it equal status with the other two completes an often challenging and creative dialogue among participants.

Reflections can then be shared in a large group dialogue.

I am often stunned by what I hear in the shared dialogue following the hearing and telling of these stories. Very few people report ever having been asked these questions, either in school, church or family. (I've wondered about this. Why do you think it is so?) Many people thank me. They later report phoning someone who helped them in the past, someone they never thanked. Others tell me that the exercise is hard, for they have no experience thinking about this and specifics are difficult for them.

Many report that the same people or institutions appear in all three stories, reflecting the mutuality and reciprocity in serving and being served. By stating that you seek something, want help, are in trouble, you create an opportunity for others to serve you—which in turn is a service. Participants often report the insight that our vulnerability creates conditions for others to serve in nonpatronizing ways and is itself a service.

Taking time to examine how we care for ourselves is often the most sobering reflection. Most participants report that the frantic, overactive aspects of their lives are difficult to confront, much less do anything about. Thus, suggestion one:

In pursuing the development of a service ethic within your institution, consider engaging community members, faculty, and students in telling their own stories and reflecting on these three questions. From the stories and reflection on these experiences, you can begin to glimpse where a service ethic and a new generation of serving and learning programs will grow.

A personal reflection on how our views of service change

Reflection on our experiences of service uncovers how over time our reasons change for wanting to serve well and be served well. Recently I heard someone say that the 15th-century saint Catherine of Siena wrote that our notions of God should change every seven years, which led me to some stories about how my own notions of service have changed over my lifetime.

As a child, an appreciation for serving was instilled as I sold vegetables door to door in a small town with my grandfather during World War II. He would say, "If they don't have money to pay you, let them have the stuff anyway. We have plenty, they don't." With my carpenter father, I often held a board or ladder as he made repairs for a neighbor. He never charged them, nor did he pay me. I watched my grandmother, aunt, and mother care for families and the common good in quiet, unpretentious ways throughout my childhood. Being a part of a family, a neighborhood and a community of small farms from an early age, I learned about mutual helpfulness as a given.

The church influenced me in my teenage years. The double message of alleviating the needs of the desperate in the world and doing good to overcome my natural human depravity gave a different twist to what had been taught me by my extended family.

During college I was controlled for a while by the notion of "magnificent obsessions": doing little things for others without their knowing it (e.g. giving blood at the Red Cross, making anonymous contributions to individuals in need).

As a fresh college graduate, under the sponsorship of a church mission board, I found myself in an Asian village. "Selfless service" on behalf of children of outcast families became the motive for that three-year assignment. I did not expect anything in return; I was there to serve, not to be served.

As the harshness of the destitution, the inequalities, and the paucity of response to despair and injustice began to dawn on me, I searched for a response. Most of what I experienced around me was a view of serving based on a notion of "You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours." If you can't do something for me, then I won't do something for you. The exchange approach did not compute well for me, for the massive exploitation of peoples and resources by primarily westerners did not produce a fair exchange. What was it about embedded systems and structures that limited people from growing and learning as human beings?

During my professional life as an educator/administrator, I attempted to work in institutions, hoping to create conditions through which everyone involved could grow and help others to grow. Throughout these efforts, my earliest influences have remained with me (except for natural depravity, which left the picture somewhere along the way) as I worked with service-based learning programs with young people and those with whom they related. Thus, suggestion two:

Arrange for small group dialogues on and off campus around the telling of stories about why we get involved in caring for others—the rationales, the shifts over time, and what they suggest for infusing a service ethic within our college and universities.

New light on the path

Recently, a perspective emerged for me that cast new light on all my prior reasons for wanting to serve and helped me begin to explore a new pathway. Thomas Berry says that the earth is primary and humans are derivative, and we are all connected—plant, animal, and human—in a common web. We fail or thrive together. Who I am and what I do are important for the whole universe. What you do is important for the whole universe and for me. We are not here to fix the world as if it were a broken machine. Our bodies are living organisms. Our task is to learn to live as whole persons in the givenness of what is around us and to appreciate the natural world with its immense beauty, its wilderness quality of growth, decay, survival, violence, and each part being true to its identity in the whole scheme of life.

This connects for me the idea of liberal arts colleges and universities making a critical contribution in this area. We have to learn to serve the earth, if it is to serve us. What will such a perspective teach us about how we serve and learn? We want students and those they serve and learn with to be creative in pursuing freedom and resisting dehumanizing behaviors and destructive forces created by humans. We serve and are served because we are indeed dependent upon one another and the natural world and the universe for our existence. Thus, suggestion three:

Organize dialogues around the assertion that the earth is primary and humans are derivative. What does this suggest for a service ethic throughout the campus and within courses in the curriculum?

Open dialogue on pedagogical issues

Increasingly, I sense faculty are willing to deal openly with the powerful influence these serving-to-learn and learning-to-serve experiences are having on themselves, students and citizens in a community. I sense community folk have thought deeply about their realities and seek company in facing them. Students want to make sense out of what bewilders them about the lack of connections between their academic learning and the realities they confront in serving-to-learn and learning-to-serve experiences. Creative framing and

exploring of these multilayered pedagogical issues might lead to a keener and fresher understanding of how we serve and learn as students, citizens, and faculty. Thus, suggestion four:

Engage faculty, community citizens, and students in story telling and reflection about what happens when their experiences lead them to face current realities, confront ambiguities, experience the forces at work in the natural world, see the consequences of injustice and misfortune, have their moral and intellectual assumptions challenged, and when they study academic disciplines in the context of these realities.

In Closing

I believe that using the service and learning typology, the four questions and the relationship map, and the four suggestions will help us design distinctive next-generation service and learning programs. As we make this journey we can promote a service ethic which in turn bolsters the commitment to create conditions both on and off campus in which all participants can be actively engaged in their own growth and helping others grow.

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